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ABSTRACT

The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service conducted a survey to determine if factors such as personal characteristics, organizational factors, career experiences, attributional processes, or sociodemographic factors related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward women in management. A sample of 266 persons serving in professional capacities in the Extension service was questioned with a mailed survey of 48 questions using a five-point Likert-type scale; 231 usable surveys were returned (87 percent). Respondents ranged from below 30 to over 60 years of age, with the greatest percentage under 35. The typical respondent was male, under 35, with an agricultural degree, married, with no children. This typical respondent had participated in very few management training opportunities and had never been supervised by a woman. The study found that female Extension workers had more favorable attitudes toward women managers than did male workers. Older, married Extension professionals held more unfavorable attitudes than younger single professionals. Extension professionals with the highest education held more positive attitudes than those without advanced degrees. Extension personnel who had been supervised by women had more favorable attitudes than those who had not. In addition, Extension professionals who had participated in management training and managerial experiences held more unfavorable attitudes toward women managers. The study concluded that such attitudes could affect employee performance. It recommended more exposure of employees to women managers and evaluation of the results of the study for their implications for training programs. (KC)

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EMPOWERING THE FEMALE MANAGER:
SELECTED ATTITUDINAL AND ATTRIBUTIONAL FACTORS
AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

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Empowering the Female Manager: Selected Attitudinal and Attributional Factors and Their Consequences

Introduction

Empirical support for many propositions in the literature, measured attitudinally, has been found for variables impacting women in public social service organizations (Ezell and Odewahn, 1980, Ezell, Odewahn and Sherman, 1981). To the practitioner, these results suggest that attitudes toward agency environment, agency recruitment and selection practices as well as co-worker perceptions are those areas which appear to have the most impact on women in management in the public social service organizations studied. These findings, coupled with an interest in empowering women professionals, led to the present study which concentrated on attitudes of professional employees of the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service (Lyday, 1985).

Effective organizations monitor their environments, keeping abreast of current as well as changing attitudes. One such method utilized by organizations is the authorization of surveys designed to examine the perceptions, attitudes and opinions of members of the organization on current issues (Dunham, 1979). Therefore the primary purpose of this study is to explore both implicit and explicit factors which affect the progression of women in management of a large public organization (Cooperative Extension Service). A secondary purpose is to investigate the role that attributions play in mediating the relationships between the attitudes and selected socio-demographic, organizational and career experience factors. To be sure, the attitudes of administrators and co-workers toward the female manager are important components of empowering the adult learner. Both actual and perceived role performance are major factors which facilitate continuing and lifelong learning of individuals

who occupy various positions in a highly formalized organization. Attitudes held by co-workers and/or their attributions are forces which the individual cannot control, but an understanding of the influence of these factors would enhance the empowering of the female professional.

The study findings should aid in ascertaining existing attitudes which may either positively or negatively affect women in various stages of management. Identification of these attitudes, within the Extension Service, can provide insight into understanding employee reactions and preferences which should help to optimize organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction. Further, the findings may be used in evaluating current policies and practices, as well as provide guidance for future action.

The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service

The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service is an integral part of the tripartite function (Teaching, Research and Extension) of the land grant institutions of North Carolina State and A & T State Universities. The North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service helps people to help themselves through the acquisition of abilities, capabilities, attitudes and skills essential for solving problems on the farm, in the home and in the community. This basis philosophy is achieved through educational programs that make use of research findings primarily coming from the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the land grant institutions (Boone, 1970). The Chancellor's Committee on Role Projection states the Extension Service, "extends to the state's citizens helpful and pragmatic information within the normal scope of activities developed through the teaching and research components of these institutions while keeping them in touch with the problems and issues of society" (Change, Technology and Accountability: A Blueprint for the Future, 1979).

At the time this research was conducted, the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service maintained a staff of approximately 840 professional positions. Of these, 176 or 21% included those individuals who managed a function, line or staff and who in most cases, had subordinates reporting to them. For purposes of this study the following are classified as management positions: County Chairmen, District Chairmen, District Program Leader, State Program Coordinator (1890), Associate State Program Leader and State Program Leader, Specialist in Charge and Department Head.

In 1985, women occupied about 11% of these managerial level positions in the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service (Personnel Directory, NCAES, 1985). In the early 1960's many of these positions were viewed as male positions according to Eloise Cofer, Retired Assistant Director (1984). However, many of the subject matter departments such as animal husbandry, crop science and poultry science had small numbers of trained women on staff who could meet the qualifications for managerial positions.

In 1971 a group of Extension employees filed a class action suit based on racial discrimination, against the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service (George Hyatt, Jr., 1971). Because of the accompanying litigation, the Extension Service received no federal assistance in developing Affirmative Action Plans or in complying with federal guidelines (Hyatt, 1971). However, according to J. D. Dodson, Equal Employment Opportunity Coordinator (1985), this Extension Service has worked to remain in voluntary compliance with federal guidelines.

One of the areas impacted by Affirmative Action is employment (Dodson, 1985). Although not operating under federal Affirmative Action guidelines since 1971, the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service has worked to employ the

most highly qualified individuals available, given due consideration to federal employment guidelines according to Michael Davis, Personnel Specialist (1984). The expanding role of women in the work force and the desire of women to aspire for managerial positions has offered the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service an opportunity to employ women in these positions as they become available. According to Chester D. Black, Director of the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service, more women would be considered for positions in management, if they would apply.

Answers to the following questions may assist in analyzing the employee environment of this Agricultural Extension Service:

1. Are the selected characteristics, i.e. age, gender, educational level, marital status and number of dependents who are children, related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward women in management?
2. Are the selected organizational factors, i.e. position, geographical location, tenure in present position, gender of supervisor, and ever supervised by a woman, related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward the progression of women into management?
3. Are the selected career experience factors, i.e. Extension experience, field of professional training, management training/experience and other career experiences related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward women in management?
4. Are selected attributional processes related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward the progression of women into management?
5. Are selected socio-demographic, organizational and career experience factors related to the attitudes of Extension professionals toward the progression of women in management when controlling for attributional processes?

Framework for the Study

The frame of reference for the major concepts of this study is depicted in Figure 1. The focus of this inquiry is attitudes of Extension professionals toward the progression of women into management. From an organizational perspective, the progression of women into management can be described in terms of: (1) the initial movement of women into management, (2) women currently functioning as managers, (3) the promotion of women into the management hierarchy (Ezell and Odewahn, 1981). Socio-demographic, organizational and career experience factors were studied. Major emphasis was placed on the process of attitude formation and the influence that attributions have on attitudes.

Attitudes

A major theoretical concept used to undergird this study of Extension professionals was attitudes. Drawing from the time honored definition of Allport (1935) an attitude is "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related." There is little doubt that attitudes are established and organized by learning.

Attitude Formation

A concept basic to this study was attitude formation. According to Gibson, et.al (1979) attitudes are learned from family, peer groups, society and previous job experiences.

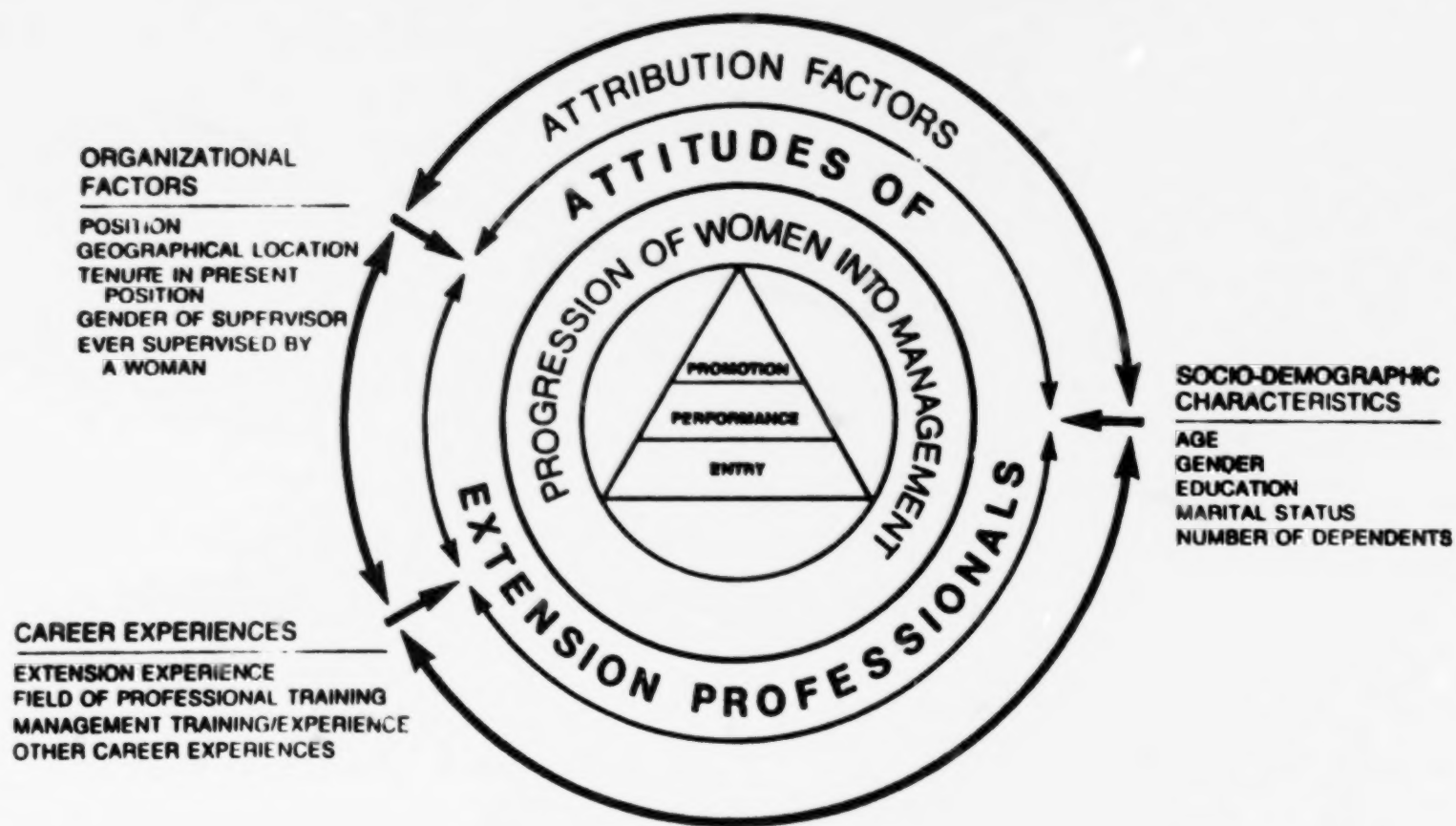


Figure 1. Factors Related to the Attitudes and Attributions of Extension Professionals Toward the Progression of Women into Management.

Employee Attitude Formation

Gibson, et.al. (1979) built on the notion that individuals learn attitudes through job experiences. Employees formulate attitudes about their jobs, co-workers and other factors relevant to the organization through actual experience, associations with other individuals and social interaction. Employees further develop attitudes about such factors as managerial capabilities and supervisors.

Attitude Measurement

Shaw and Wright (1967) propose that the intensity of attitudes can be assessed on a continuum from negative to positive. Travers (1967) reports that the typical methods for attitude measurement rely on verbal behaviors as expressed through the utilization of ordered sets of statements in attitude scales. Organizational surveys are proposed by Dunham and Smith (1979) as an effective method of assessing attitudes of organizational members.

Attributions

Kelley (1967) formally introduced attribution theory setting forth attributional processes as those governing the attention individuals give to events around them. Attribution theory has been primarily concerned with the individual's perception of the causes of the behavior of other people. Weiner (1974) sets forth in Figure 2 the following factors or processes that are common

in the literature today: effort, ability, luck and task difficulty. Weiner (1974) also made a distinction between stable and unstable conditions as follows:

	Stable	Unstable
Internal	Ability	Effort
External	Task Difficulty	Luck

Figure 2. Classification of Attributional Factors by Stability and Locus of Control

Thus, while task difficulty and luck are both processes external to the individual, task difficulty is relatively stable with luck subject to change. The internal processes, ability and effort, can be similarly differentiated: ability is viewed as stable, while effort may vary.

Dewey (1958) wrote, "meaning is primarily a property of behavior." The meaning of concepts used in adult education which purport to describe or explain adult behavior must reflect the meaning adults construct for their experiences. The point of view of the individual (or employee) is a technique which will continue to yield vital and valid data for how researchers come to understand the relationship between intentions and actions.

Method

Survey research according to Warwick (1973) legitimately includes studies of attitudes and beliefs as well as public opinion and population census studies. This research included the responses of selected professional Extension workers in certain job groups. The stratified sample represents 30% of the Extension population of the selected job groups or a total of 366 employees.

At the time the sample was drawn, 478 individuals were serving as County Agents. A 30% random sample was drawn including 76 female, 67 male for a total of 143. The stratified sample for County Chairmen included all the female Chairmen (10) and 20 additional selected male Chairmen for a total of 30. From the district level job group which included District Program Leaders, District Chairmen and State Program Coordinators (1890), the total population of 19 was used. The stratified sample for the state level job group - a population of 245 State Specialists, Specialists in Charge and Department Heads - included the 34 functioning female specialists, and 40 selected males from these groups comprising a total job group sample of 74. The total sample consisted of 266 individuals selected from an 842 member population, with a gender mix of 125 females and 141 males.

An instrument with a five point Likert type scale consisting of 48 statements was identified and adapted to measure attitudes of Extension professionals toward women in management. The survey of Extension professionals, with an accompanying cover letter was mailed to a total of 266 individuals in the four different job groups. Two hundred thirty one useable surveys were received from respondents for a return rate of 87 percent. Returned survey instruments were carefully examined and the data tabulated for each statement.

Findings

A profile of the 231 Extension professionals who participated in this study provides a perspective for interpretation of the findings. The total number of respondents was 231, with 120 males and 111 females. Respondents ranged in age from less than 35 to 60 and above, with the greatest percentage falling in the

under 35 category. Ages of the respondents by gender were fairly evenly distributed with 12% fewer females in the 50 to 60 and above category.

The largest group of respondents, 55% were County Agents, while 12% were County Chairmen. At the state level, 8% held the position of District Chairman, District Program Leader or State Program Coordinator (1890), while 25% were State Specialists, Specialists in Charge or Department Heads. A broader analysis of position by function revealed that 74% of the respondents held program positions, compared with 27% who held support positions.

About two-thirds of the respondents reported their highest degree in either Agriculture or Home Economics, while 22% reported their highest degree in education. Assessment of the management training experiences of the respondents yielded interesting statistics. Over 50% of the respondents had participated in less than three management/training sessions. Approximately 40% reported participation in three to four management training experiences, while only 7% reported participating in five to seven management training opportunities.

In summary, the typical respondent was male, under 35 years of age, with an agricultural degree, married, with no children. He is more than likely an Agriculture Agent serving at the county level with less than four years of experience. This typical respondent has participated in very few management training opportunities and has never been supervised by a woman.

Relationships were found between attitudes toward women managers and certain socio-demographic, organizational and career experience factors. The female Extension workers held the more favorable attitudes toward women managers. Conversely, the male Extension workers held the more unfavorable attitudes toward women managers. This conclusion is consistent with Ezell, Odewahn and Sherman (1981).

Older and married Extension professionals held the more unfavorable attitudes than the younger single professionals. A similar conclusion that can be drawn is that those Extension professionals with the highest education, i.e. masters and doctoral degrees held the more positive attitudes toward female managers.

Those Extension workers who had had the experience of being supervised by a woman held more favorable attitudes toward women managers. This conclusion is similar to Ezell, Odewahn and Sherman (1981). Furthermore, those Extension professionals who had participated in management training and managerial experiences held more unfavorable attitudes toward women managers. It should be noted that content of management training and managerial experiences was not addressed.

While controlling for attributions, Extension professionals in positions at the district and state level held more favorable attitudes toward women entering management. Likewise, with attributions controlled, Extension professionals with more tenure in their present positions, held more favorable attitudes toward the promotion of females within the management hierarchy.

Those Extension professionals with the more positive attitudes attributed psychological factors such as ability, effort, luck and task difficulty to the entry, performance and promotion of women in management.

Conclusions and Implications

From the conclusion that a person's gender, and possibly their age and educational level influences their attitudes toward the entry, performance and promotion of female managers, certain implications can be drawn.

If covert behaviors differ between male and female employees, then corresponding overt behaviors could likewise be expected to differ. This implication can have meaning for adult educators in planning for change. Male and female employees may have different training needs and may therefore require varied training experiences.

The presence of negative attitudes could affect the Extension professional's working relationship with clientele in a number of ways. For instance, it is possible that situations could exist where the attitudes of the Extension workers were manifest in working with clientele. The presence of negative attitudes could affect the on the job performance of an Extension worker. It is possible that these negative attitudes could preclude a county Extension staff from placing women in leadership positions in the advisory leadership system. It is also possible that the attitudes held by Extension staff may also influence how an employee might relate to male or female subordinates. It is also possible that the negative attitudes of an employee could surface in working closely with colleagues as well as subordinates.

In situations where a woman is promoted to County or District Chairman, Specialist in Charge or Department Head, the staff may need assistance in making adjustments, as well as the new manager, for a smooth transition. Therefore, staff development training for both men and women staff members as well as the new female manager is implied.

Those Extension workers who had experienced being supervised by a woman tended to have the more positive attitudes. This conclusion offers the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service the opportunity to employ more women in managerial positions and to place women managers in additional leadership roles such as chairmen of committees, task forces, etc. affording employees more experiences in working with and under the supervision of female managers.

Additional implications from the stated conclusion can be drawn for staff development training. If managerial training and experiences influence attitudes toward women managers, then it would be important for staff development experiences to include women trainers in visible positions of leadership. Specifically, in North Carolina it would be important that the planning committee for special management training, include women as well as an emphasis on the utilization of women facilitators. Following this logic, the Extension In Service Training Program would continue to include competent women in the planning process and in teaching situations. An important factor for those planning staff development training is not to overuse the same women, to prevent the idea that those women involved are tokens.

It is suggested that additional research be conducted that would include top level administrators. It could also be helpful to expand the population sample to include a cross section of Cooperative Extension Service organizations from other states, obtaining a more comprehensive data base for analyzing employee attitudes toward women managers. This study could be replicated in another state and the benchmark data used for comparisons.

If psychological factors such as ability, effort, luck, and task difficulty influence attitudes toward women managers, then additional research is implied for investigating the role played by these factors.

Future studies of women managers could include direct on the job observation of overt behaviors of both employees and women managers in the Cooperative Extension Service.

In summary, the attitudes of administrators and colleagues toward the female manager are important components of empowering the adult learner. Both actual and perceived role performance are major factors which facilitate continuing and lifelong learning of Extension professionals who occupy various managerial positions within the Cooperative Extension Service. Female managers cannot control the attitudes or attributions held by their co-workers, however an understanding of the influence of these factors could enhance the empowering of these female professionals.

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